

BENIN PROVINCE

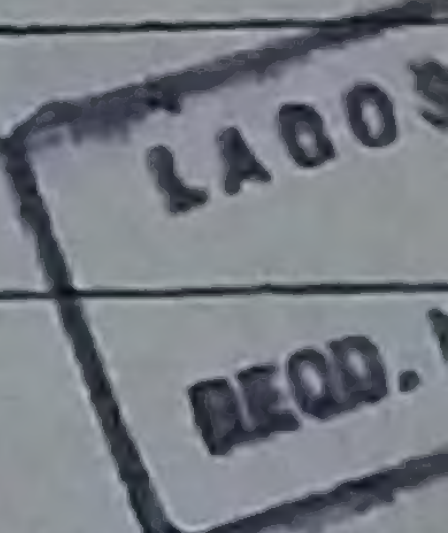
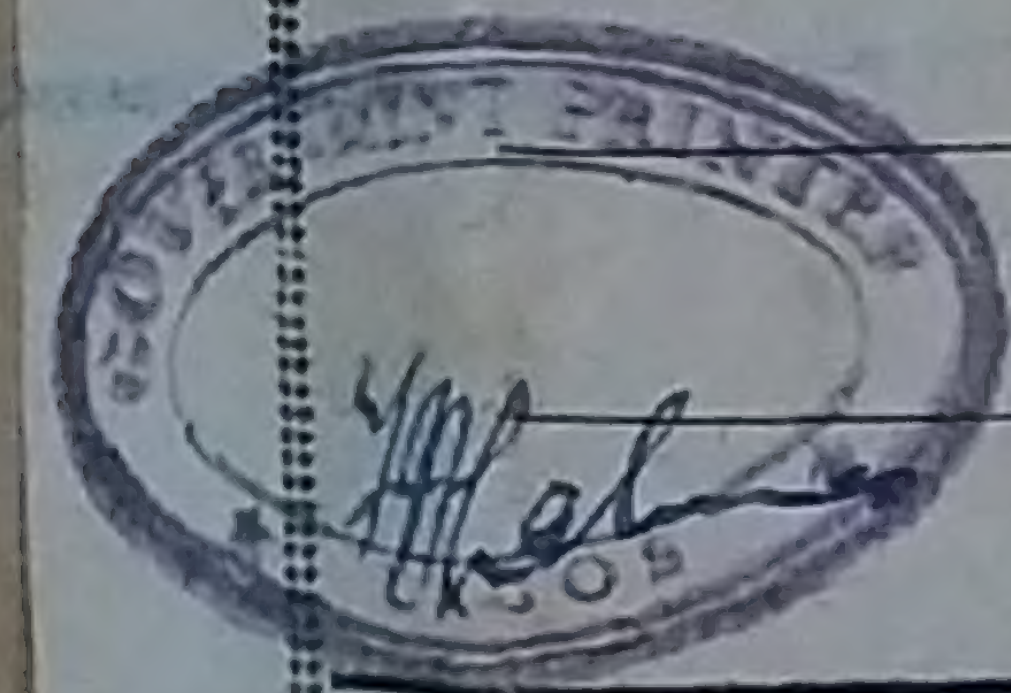
UKUN VILLAGE, ISHAN DIVISION.

WP. 15534 A.

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Surveyor General
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NOTE.—PARCEL OF GREAT IMPORTANCE
SPEEDY TRANSPORT

INTELLIGENCE REPORT ON UKUN VILLAGE,
ISHAN DIVISION BY MR. J. E. JULL,
ASST. DISTRICT OFFICER,
NOVEMBER, 1932.

WP. 15534 A

I. INTRODUCTORY.

This report deals with the Village of Ukun - a small Ishan village about 5 miles north of Ekpoma in the Ishan Division and 4 miles south-west of Idua in the Kukuruku Division. Ukun is a village of some 400 inhabitants on the southern slope of the northernmost ridge of the Ishan Plateau and is divided into 9 small quarters consisting of 4 to 12 houses each. The houses are rectangular in shape and are built with mud walls, roofs of leaves and wooden doors. As a man's family - and so his wealth - increases, he builds additional houses until the housing accommodation of himself and his family forms an enclosed rectangular compound.

2. Ukun is 5 miles distant from the main road from Ubiaja to Benin and a former road to it from Ekpoma is now closed. It is therefore not only small but well off the beaten track and it has not been much affected by modern developments. The people are of small stature and generally of light complexion. Their usual clothing consists of a long cloth wrapped round the body under one arm-pit with the other end thrown over the other shoulder. The majority wear factory-bought cloth and only the poorer sort wear the locally-woven Ishan cloth. A very few of the younger men wear European clothes. The men are almost exclusively engaged in farming and collecting palm-produce. The marketing of produce is carried out by the women and there are no local traders. A certain amount of Ishan cloth is woven locally by the women but this industry has almost died out since the establishment of two European factories at Uromi, and the consequent increase of imported cloth offered for sale in the local market.

3. There is a Roman Catholic Mission School - unregistered - which is also used as a Church but the only converts - if they may be so called - are the pupils who do not at present number more than 17 and of whom none are more than 15 years of age. The Christian and educated element is at present negligible. About half of the inhabitants have embraced a tolerant form of Mohammedanism; the rest are pagans.

4. The gross tax paid by Ukun amounts to only £43.17/- and it is clear that with such a small revenue Ukun will be an extremely impoverished Native Administration. With this, however, they said they were quite willing to bear provided they had a Court of their own and financial control of their own revenue. Love of independence seems to be their salient characteristic, for whereas, they were adamant in their opposition to any union for any purposes with the neighbouring Clans of Ewu, Irrua or Ekpoma, (for they know only too well that they would be the minor parties in such a union) they had no objections to the superior control of the Ishan Council. This is quite comprehensible. Ever since the founding of Ukun, its people have had to fight the neighbouring Clans to preserve their independence and now that they have successfully done so, they have no intention of voluntarily surrendering it. There is, however, in their eyes no loss of dignity involved in submitting to the control of a Federal Council to which all other Enogies are also subject.

5. There are no foreign settlements in Ukun land, and the educated and christian element as already mentioned is at present negligible.

6. The outlines of the proposals have been laid before the people and have received their unanimous approval.

7. The following local terms are used in the Report:-

Enogie - Hereditary Chieftain.
Odion(P.Edion) - Elder.
Odionwele - the Oldest living Elder)
Olagele (P.Elagele) - Titled man.

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II. GEOGRAPHICAL.

8. The territory of Ukun covers an area of approximately 10 square miles and is inhabited by a population of about 400 persons. The average density of population is therefore 40 per square mile.

9. To the north the boundary of Ukun coincides with that of the Ishan and Kukuruku Divisions which runs roughly due east and west about 12 miles north of Ukun; the neighbouring towns on this side are Era and Idua in the Kukuruku Division. To the east the boundary with Idua extends apparently for 2 miles southwards into the Ishan Division till it meets the boundary with Ekpoma. To the south the boundary with Ekpoma runs westwards about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles to the south of Ukun; then finally turning northwards along the boundary with Egoro it meets the starting point on the Ishan - Kukuruku Boundary. The people of Ukun state that their land at no point borders on either Ewu or Irrua land from which they say they are separated by a strip of Idua land extending into Ishan Division.

10. The area which contains no outstanding physical features, is situated on the southern slopes of the northernmost ridge of the Ishan Plateau. To the north and east the land consists of savannah interspersed with patches of forest and elephant-grass, while towards the south and west, there is high forest and low farm bush. Several streams rise in the ridge on which Ukun is situated but none are of any size or importance.

III. HISTORICAL.

11. The founder of Ukun is said to have been Ukuanlan a son of an Oba of Benin who came from Benin as the result of a quarrel with his father and after settling temporarily in what is now Ekpoma land founded Ukun on its present site. He married a wife from Okpugie Village in Uzebba in Ora, called Ekpekarama and by her begot a son called Okpa.

/Okpa ...

Okpa was succeeded by his three brothers Agba, Ebiki and Okoro. None of the above rulers was considered to rank as an Enogie but Oba, son of Okoro is held by tradition to have been the first Enogie. One tradition says that Oba went to the Oba of Benin and received from him his Ada and Eben - the insignia of Ishan Chieftainship - and also a brass helmet. There is no Ada or Eben now at Ukun and the explanation advanced by the supporters of this tradition that both were seized and carried off by the soldiers of the Nupe invader, Babalogun who plundered Ukun shortly afterwards, is ingenious but unconvincing. The second tradition is that Oba never had an Ada or an Eben but was presented with the brass helmet only. This is still preserved in Ukun. As the Enogie of Ukun never had the power of execution, this latter tradition is far the more probable.

12. The brass helmet is made of very thin beaten brass, which has now rusted away in parts and in shape resembles the Hausa straw sun hat more than anything else. The brass ~~is~~ is so thin that the helmet must obviously have been intended for adornment on state occasions rather than for use in war.

13. Oba who must have ruled about 1860-1870, was given the nick-name Ogielegbe which means "the independent one" and this seems to commemorate a declaration by Ukun of its independence of the neighbouring Enogies. It was during his reign that Ukun was invaded and plundered by the Nupe warrior Babalogun and the people driven for refuge to Chumudumu in Ekpoma and it was in this raid that the invaders are said to have captured and carried off the Ada and Eben of Oba. After this invasion - Oba and his successors were engaged in continual warfare with all the neighbouring towns - Ekpoma, Ewu, Idua, Irrua, Egoro, Era and Agbede. Also about the time of the first Iwolli patrol in 1904, Ukun was plundered by Omigie, a captain of the Obaseki of Benin. However, in spite of these almost continuous wars

visit of a European to Ukun was that of a Government Officer whose name is given as Moore who passed through on his way from Agbede to Ekpoma, shortly after the Iwolli patrol in Irrua District, and in connection with the establishment of Ekpoma Native Court. On this occasion the Enogie of Ukun was chosen to be a member of Ekpoma Native Court which was set up shortly afterwards in 1905. Ukun remained in Ekpoma Native Court area where it has remained ever since.

17. Direct taxation was first introduced into the Ishan Division including the Irrua Native Court area in 1920. The rate which was first fixed at 2/- per adult male and 1/- per adult female, was in 1927 altered to 7/- per adult male, women being exempted from payment of tax.

18. In 1921 the Ishan Council was established. This body which at first was vested with judicial powers only, as the Ishan Native Court, was constituted the supreme judicial authority of the Division and empowered to hear appeals from the local native courts. The local Native Courts however still remained the Native Authorities for their own areas and it was not till 1930 that the Ishan Council was constituted the Native Authority for the whole division.

19. The members of the Central Council were styled District Heads and were as far as the Isa part of the division was concerned - Enogies who either from long service to Government, or from the size of their towns or from their ability, were considered suitable to be entrusted with the charge of a District, i.e. one of the Native Court areas. This system endured till early in 1931 when the title and position of District Head were abolished and the Ishan Council proceeded to issue orders direct to each independent Enogie.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE.

20. The village of Ukun is divided into quarters or idumus, but these quarters are so small - consisting of an average of 14 adult males - that they are frequently a single directly-descended family. The organisation of the village, however, rested upon a division of the male population into age grades, namely:-

(a) Egbonugele; (b) Igele; (c) Edion.

21. A boy enters the Egbonugele age-grade at about the age of 6. His work is to clean the lanes and paths of the village and to carry wood and water. This age-grade is again subdivided into 3 sub-classes according to the ages of the members so that the lightest tasks only are given to the youngest boys and the heavier ones are allotted to the older and stronger members. The maximum age of an Egbonugele is about 25. After this age he passes into the Igele age-grade.

22. The Igele used to act as a police force in the town and to provide the ranks of the fighting force. They also used to assist the Egbonugele in the execution of such village work as was considered beyond the capacity of that age-grade. The Igele also are subdivided into 3 sub-classes the most important of which for administrative purposes was that known as the Otuleha. This was the senior sub-class but admission to it was granted not merely on the ground of seniority but also on that of intelligence and ability. The Otuleha could settle disputes between members of their own and the Egbonugele age-grade but their main task was to act as police, calling in the rest of the Igele to assist them as they considered desirable or necessary. Thus they provided the machinery of enforcement of judicial and administrative orders proceeding from the Enogie.

23. In the normal way, an Otuleha passed into the Edion age-grade about the age of 45 but if for any reason, such as death or disease, the ranks of the Edion age-grade were unduly depleted, he could be co-opted into the Edion age-grade at an earlier age. The Edion age-grade consisted of the older men in the village, and was presided over by the Odionwele of Egwarre who was considered the Senior Odionwele of all Ukun. The Odionwele of Egwarre was always considered as the next man to the Enogie in dignity and power.

24. There was a fourth class of men consisting of titled men, known generically as Elagele. Individual titles seem to have been unknown originally but the intercourse of those Elagele who have sat as Court Members with the Ekaimo or titled men of Ekpoma and Irrua has led a few of them to adopt individual titles such as Iyasere etc., but it is recognised that these titles are merely importations from neighbouring Ishan towns and are not native to Ukun. Admission to the ranks of the Elagele was obtained by purchase from the Enogie and the title is not necessarily hereditary. There is at least one titled men in each quarter. The sole task of these titled men is admitted to be purely that of acting as messengers of the Enogie.

25. The quarters of Ukun - nine in number - are, as mentioned above very small, none consisting of more than 12 houses and inhabited generally by a single directly descended family. None of these quarters is more than half a mile from Egwarre, the Enogie's quarter and control has as a result, tended to become centralised in the Enogie and the powers of the quarters to manage their own affairs are so limited as to be negligible. Each quarter had its own Odionwele who was in charge but his administrative powers if they may be so called - were limited to instructing the younger members of his family to clean the paths and open

/cleanings

cleanings near the houses.

26. All administrative orders emanated from the Enogie in consultation with the elders. The sovereign body of the village was the Enogie in consultation with the Odionwele of Egwarre presiding over the full Village Meeting consisting of all members of the Edion age grade. When it was necessary to decide upon questions of policy or to arrange for the execution of any course of action, the Enogie would first consult with the Senior Odionwele of the whole village; he would then summon the titled men from each quarter and instruct each of them to inform the Odionwele of his quarter to attend a Village Meeting at an appointed time; the Village Meeting was held in the space in front of the Enogie's house and was attended by the Elders, the Elagele, the Otuleha and the leaders of the Igele and Egbonugele; the rest of the town used to gather round to listen. The Enogie first laid the matter in question before the Edion for discussion; he could call upon the Elagele or anyone he thought fit to give their advice or opinion. After the Edion had fully discussed the matter and communicated their opinion to the Enogie he would then return to consult with the Senior Odionwele. This done, he would come forward and announce his decision to the assembled meeting. In theory the Enogie's decision could be absolutely in contradiction to the views of the elders; in practice, it never was.

27. Immediately after announcing his decision, the Enogie would give orders for its execution, to the War Captain in case of war, and through the Otuleha to the leaders of the Igele and Egbonugele in the case of village work that had to be done. In minor matters which did not require or justify the calling of a village meeting the Enogie could make his decision alone and issue the necessary orders to the persons concerned through his personal servants or, if he thought fit through one of the

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Elagele.

28. This organisation survives intact in Ukun, though the village Meeting is not called so frequently as when it was a completely independent unit. This is no doubt due to its isolation from contact with the outside world and the absence of the often disintegrating influence of Christianity and of any considerable educated element. Also the policy consistently pursued in the Division of leaving each Enogie to control his own town has tended to preserve it. When before the introduction of tax, Ukun was ordered to supply free labour for the construction of roads, a Village Meeting would be called for the Enogie to convey the orders of the District Officer to the people and for the Enogie and Elders to consider ways and means, and at the present time, the Village Meeting still assembles to decide what matters shall be brought up for discussion with the District Officer on his visit.

29. The procedure in tax collection is as follows. The amount of tax due from Ukun is ascertained by reference to the nominal rolls and two lists of the sums due from Ukun are made, one such list is kept in the Native Administration Treasury Office. The other with the requisite number of discs is handed over by the District Officer to the Enogie of Ukun. The latter has always been accustomed to call a village meeting, to inform it that tax collection must begin and, in consultation, with the Elders, to appoint a day on which the people are to come to him and pay in their tax. The Enogie has been accustomed to keep the collection of tax in his own hands and not to distribute the discs amongst the quarters.

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V. JUDICIAL.

41. In pre government times the administration of justice was in the hands of the Village Meeting. Disputes in
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the various quarters came before the quarter elders but their jurisdiction was limited to the arbitration of minor civil disputes between members of the same quarter. If the matter in dispute was of any importance or if the case was too complicated for the quarter elders, the case was referred for settlement by the Enogie in the Village Meeting; also any person who was dissatisfied with the finding of the elders could take his case to the Enogie in the Village Meeting. The elders in ehtie quarters sat purely as civil arbitrators and there was no machinery for the enforcement of their findings. The elders were strictly forbidden to deal with any criminal case.

42. The sole judicial body was the Village Meeting presided by the Enogie in consultation with the Odionwele. The composition of the Village Meeting was the same for judicial as for administrative purposes. If a crime had been committed or if a civil dispute had arisen which was too important or too complicated for the quarter elders and in which one or both of the parties had refused to accept the arbitration of the elders, the matter was immediately reported to the Enogie by the Odionwele of the quarter through the Senior Titled Man of that quarter. The Enogie would then appoint a day for the hearing of the case and the parties were informed by the titled men of their quarters concerned. Each titled man also informed the Odionwele of his quarter of the day appointed by the Enogie for the hearing of the case.

43. In the case of a crime, the accused was brought before the Enogie immediately at the orders of the Odionwele of the quarter concerned. The Senior Titled Man of the quarter was responsible for bringing the accused before the Enogie, and men accused of crimes were detained in the Enogie's house till the day of the trial. Criminal cases were always dealt with as early as possible after the accused was brought before the Enogie.

44. If a party to a civil dispute refused to obey the summons of the Senior Titled Man of his quarter or if an accused man offered resistance when the Senior Titled Man went to take him before the Enogie, it was the duty of the Senior Titled Man to report to the Enogie, who then detailed the leader of the Otuleha to go to accompany the Senior Titled Man and effect the arrest of the recalcitrant person and to bring him before the Enogie by force. The Otuleha were thus the police force of the village.

45. The Village Meeting assembled outside the Enogie's house. All persons who wished could be present at the meeting. The full court consisted of the Enogie in consultation with the Senior Odionwele assisted by all the elders and the Titled Men. The presence of at least one elder preferably the Odionwele and one Titled Man from the quarter or quarters from which the parties to the dispute came was essential. If the Odionwele of a quarter to which one of the parties belonged were unable to attend, he sent the Senior Titled Man accompanied by one of the junior elders to represent him and state his opinion before the meeting. The Senior Titled Man always acted as spokesman for the Odionwele while the elder who accompanied him, seemed to have held a watching brief for the Odionwele and to have seen to it that the Odionwele's opinion were correctly interpreted to the Enogie.

46. Both parties stated their case before the meeting and called their witnesses. The Enogie's chief adviser was the Senior Odionwele but before announcing his decision the Enogie always took care to ascertain the opinions of the body of the elders, and difficult cases would be discussed with them at length. The person whose opinion was most sought after would in most cases be the Odionwele of the quarter concerned or if he were absent the Senior Titled Man who represented him. The Enogie could always ask for the opinion of any titled man but their advice on

judicial matters seems to have been less frequently sought than when administrative matters were under discussion. The function of the Titled men was primarily that of messengers between the Enogie and the Odionweles of the various quarters who were responsible for the appearance of the parties, and it was only as representative of the Odionwele of his quarter that a Senior Titled man's opinion seems to have been much consulted.

47. The following offences were regarded as crimes:- murder, manslaughter, larceny and arson; adultery was regarded both as a criminal and a civil offence. The crime of kidnapping was apparently unknown and no penalty was fixed for it. Rape was not considered a crime but a religious offence which could be expiated by sacrifice to the juju. The method of dealing with the various offence is given below:-

(a) Murder. The murderer was sold to one of the neighbouring villages as a slave.

(b) Manslaughter: The man found guilty of manslaughter was forced to replace the man he had killed or be enslaved himself. The persons killed seem always to have been hunters who were servants or slaves. The people had no recollection of titled man being accidentally killed.

(c) Larceny: The penalty was restoration of the stolen article or its equivalent value and a fine of 6/- in cowries.

(d) ~~Arson~~ Arson: The penalty for this offence, if no one was killed, was a fine in cowries. The amount is uncertain but it was heavier than that for larceny. This crime appears to have been very rare.

(e) Adultery. The adulterer had to provide a goat and fowl for purificatory sacrifice and to buy a new cloth for the woman. He also paid a fine of 6/- in cowries.

48. The enforcement of all the above penalties was in the hands of the Otuleha, assisted by the rest of the

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Igele age-grade. The collection of fines was carried out also by the Otuleha by distress upon livestock and moveables, the amount realised from fines being ~~ad~~ divided amongst the Edion age-classes.

49. At the first establishment of Native Courts in this division, the District Officer sat as President of the Native Court with the Native Court Member as assessors to assist him. This was the procedure up till 1912 when the Court Members were allowed to sit in Court and decide cases themselves, the District Officer only visiting the Court to review cases in which one or both of the parties expressed themselves as dissatisfied with the decision of the Court. In 1920 the Ishan Judicial Council was set up as the supreme native judicial authority and cases which were too important or too complicated for the local Native Courts were transferred to the Ishan Judicial Council. The District Officer could review cases in the Ishan Judicial Council in the same way as in the local native courts. This was the procedure up till the end of 1931 when the Ishan Council practically ceased to exercise its judicial powers.

50. In the Isa part of the division all Enogies who were of age and who had not shown themselves unfit to hold a judicial position were selected as Court Members as a matter of course. The other court members were without exception titled men. Great care was taken in the selection of the titled men to ascertain that they had the approval firstly of the elders of their village, and secondly of the Enogie. In Ukun the titled men seemed to have kept in mind their position and functions under the ancient system and not to have arrogated too much power to themselves. The smallness of the village and the immediate presence of the Enogie and in consequence the easy access which the elders could have to the Enogie in the Village Meeting to complain, also no doubt contributed to stop

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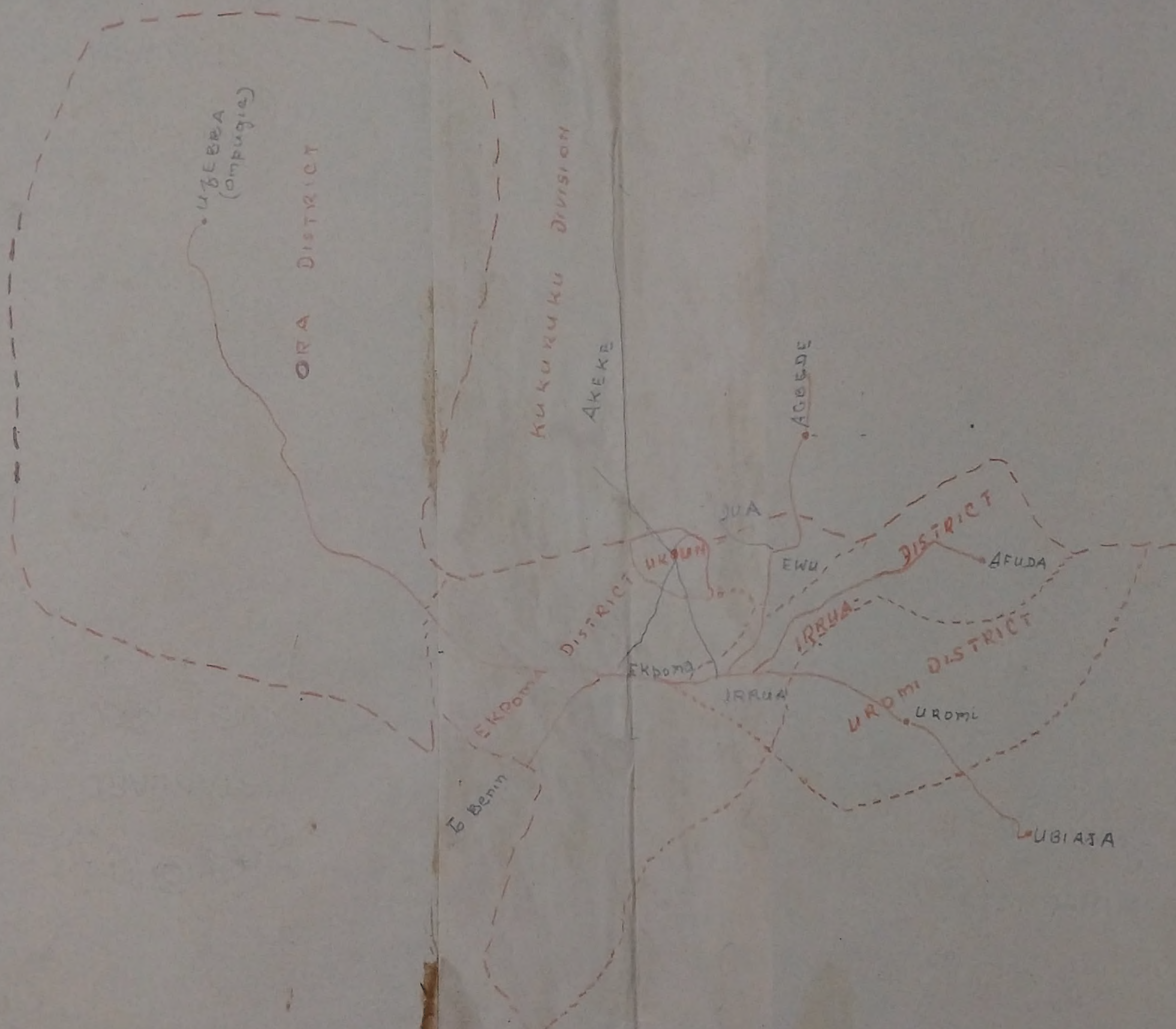
any tendency of this kind. As a result the titled men of Ukun make no pretension to the possession of judicial powers in Ukun to the exclusion of the elders and admit that their true position is that of advisers and messengers of the Enogie and spokesmen for the Odionwele of their quarter.

51. The ancient judicial organisation has naturally been greatly weakened by the subordination of Ukun to the jurisdiction first of Ekpoma and then Irrua Native Court. The Village Meeting as a result now confines itself entirely to arbitration in civil matters and to unofficial preliminary inquiries in criminal matters.

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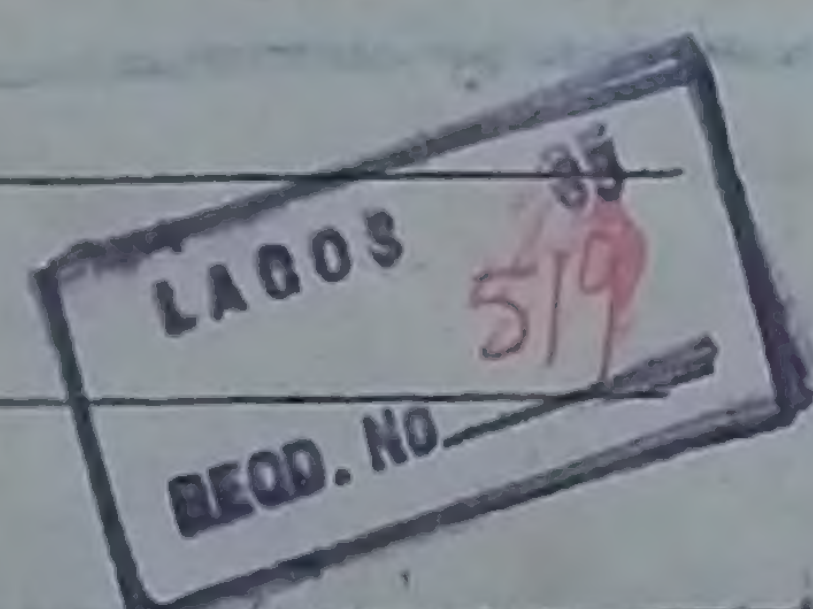


LEGGEDE
BOUNDARY OF OKUN
DIVISIONAL BOUNDARY
DISTRICT BOUNDARY
ROAD
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VILLAGE • EWU

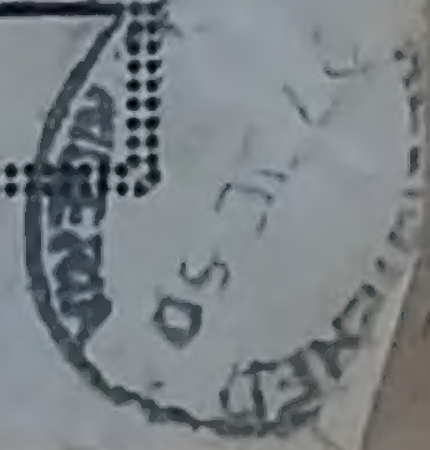
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ON HIS MAJESTY'S SERVICE

Surveyor of Antiquities
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NOTE.—PARCEL OF GREAT IMPORTANCE REQUIRING
SPEEDY TRANSPORT

